

Michigan Air National Guard Combat History, 1917-2013

By Tech. Sgt. Dan Heaton
127th Wing Public Affairs
Michigan Air National Guard
Selfridge Air National Guard Base

(March 6, 2017) -- In the post-9/11 world, the Michigan Air National Guard has been in constant demand, deploying Airmen and aircraft almost continuously since the day of the terror attack that marked the start of a new era.

The Michigan ANG's combat history goes back long before Sept. 11, 2001, however. One of the state's flying units served in World War I. The other two were born of the crucible of World War II. All three — and more — served in Korea.

The combat history of the Michigan Air National Guard in recent decades reflects the changing nature of warfare in the modern-era. During the first half of the Air National Guard's roughly 100 years of existence (assuming one includes the predecessors of the independent Air Force in that history) the Michigan ANG was primarily called on only to support major mobilizations, most notably World Wars I and II and the Korean War.

Today, the Michigan ANG contributes to a far more complex and fluid environment, both for our nation and our Air National Guard. By some measure, the argument can be made that, as of this writing in 2015, the Air Force and the Michigan ANG has been continuously engaged in a combat or potential combat environment for nearly 25 years. Given this changing environment, writing a "combat-only" history of the Michigan ANG presents a challenge for the researcher.

No matter what criteria of measurement is used, the operating environment for the nation and the Air National Guard changed markedly on Sept. 11, 2001, when the nation's homeland was attacked and combat action in both Afghanistan and Iraq eventually followed.

This booklet is the follow-on to an earlier historical overview, Michigan ANG at War, 1917-1953. It is intended to provide a brief overview of the missions and combat deployments of the Michigan Air National Guard between the end of the Korean War and 2013, a 60-year period. While this history will highlight the missions of the Michigan ANG's 107th, 171st and 172nd squadrons, the state's three flying units, readers can be assured that scores of maintenance and other supporting Airmen stood behind every mission. And while the history covered in this booklet ends in 2013, it should be noted that even as these words are being written in 2015, Michigan Airmen continue to serve in locations around the world, in deployments large and small.

From the earliest traditions of the Minuteman to today's high-tech, modern force, Michigan Airmen continue to set the standards for others to follow. These pages contain but a small part of

their story.

The 107th Aero Squadron is born

World War I began barely a decade after the Wright Brothers' first flight. U.S. military aviation was in its infancy when the war began. With the U.S. declaration of war in the spring of 1917, the Army began a rapid build-up of "aero squadrons" to complement the massive land forces that would be needed during the war. Among those units created in the summer of 1917 was the 107th Aero Squadron, the predecessor of today's 107th Fighter Squadron. The 107th is the only Michigan flying squadron that traces its lineage back to the World War I era. Michigan's other two flying squadrons, the 171st and 172nd, both were born of necessity during the second World War. Selfridge Field was also created in the build-up for World War I, though at that time, the field was not used by the Michigan National Guard. Through 1971, the history of Selfridge and of the Michigan Air National Guard existed on two separate tracks.

The modern 107th Fighter Squadron traces its lineage to the 107th Aero Squadron, one of numerous U.S. Army Air Service units created as the United States entered World War I. The squadron spent almost all of 1918 in France as part of the American Expeditionary Forces. The unit spent the bulk of the war at the 3rd Air Instructional Center, Issoudun Aerodrome, in central France. Though the 107th is one of the oldest flying squadrons in today's Air National Guard, its service in World War I consisted of primarily an aviation support role.

The U.S. declared war on Germany and the Central Powers on April 6, 1917. The first U.S. troops began arriving in France in late May 1917, but it would be October 1917 before the AEF was in place and fully prepared to engage in its first major operations at the front lines of the war.

The 107th Aero Squadron was organized at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, on Aug. 27, 1917, formed of approximately 150 recruits primarily from Vancouver Barracks in Washington state and Fort Thomas, Kentucky. The 107th Aero Squadron organized at Kelly was completely separate from the 107th Aero Squadron (Service) that would later be created, in March 1918, at Rich Field in Waco, Texas.

After two months of basic indoctrination, the 107th was sent to the Aviation Concentration Center, Garden City, Long Island, New York, on Oct. 26, 1917. After additional training at the AIC, the squadron moved by train to St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, where, on Dec. 7, 1917, it boarded the SS Tuscania, a cruise ship pressed into duty as a troop transport vessel, for passage to England. The squadron arrived in Liverpool, England, on Christmas morning, Dec. 25, 1917. (The Tuscania would be sunk by a German U-boat on Feb. 5, 1918, resulting in a loss of more than 200 soldiers and crews. Among the units that were on board at the time were elements of the 32nd Infantry Division, made up of soldiers from Michigan and Wisconsin National Guards.) After further travel, the 107th arrived at the AEF Replacement Concentration Center, St. Maixent Barracks, France, on Jan. 2, 1918. At St. Maixent, the 107th was redesignated as the 801st Aero Squadron, and later as the 801st Aero Squadron (Repair), and used as a pool of general labor

around the camp for about two months.

Finally, the squadron was deployed to the Issoudun Aerodrome on February 21, where it remained through the end of the war. At Issoudun, American pilots were given their final combat flight training prior to being sent to front-line squadrons. The American pilots were given their initial flight training at air fields in the U.S., including the newly-created Selfridge Field in Michigan. During the war, Issoudun was the largest “aerodrome,” or airport, in the world, with a total of 15 adjacent air fields (only 10 of which were completed and in use by the war’s end). While at Issoudun, the 801st was assigned to the facility’s Field 1, working in the aircraft assembly and test departments. In June, the squadron sent a detachment of about 100 men – more than half of its strength – to Issoudun’s Field 2 and was tasked with the general operation of the field.

The squadron remained at Issoudun, conducting air field operations and assembling, servicing and repairing aircraft through the armistice to end the war on Nov. 11, 1918. The unit remained at Issoudun until January 1919, winding down operations at the field. After a brief stay in the French port city of St. Nazaire, awaiting transport across the Atlantic, the squadron was returned to the U.S. in March and arrived at Hazelhurst Field (later named Mitchel Air Force Base) in Long Island, New York, where on March 18, 1919, the unit was officially demobilized and most its personnel returned to civilian life.

In 1925, a group of 20 officers and 90 enlisted men began meeting weekly in a Detroit garage and created the Michigan National Guard’s first flying unit. On May 7, 1926, the unit received federal recognition and was designated as the 107th Observation Squadron. At the time, the 107th was the fifth National Guard flying squadron so designated. In 1936, the lineage and honors of the 107th Aero Squadron/801st Aero Squadron were consolidated with those of the new 107th Observation Squadron. The squadron has remained a component of the Michigan National Guard since that time.

WWI: Selfridge Field is launched

While Selfridge Field began in the early days of U.S. involvement in World War I — and there was a Michigan National Guard unit at the base on the very first day it became a military installation — the Michigan National Guard did not have a significant presence at the base until the 1970s.

Selfridge Field became a military air base on July 1, 1917, when Company G, 22nd Infantry, 125th Infantry Regiment, of the Michigan National Guard took possession of the property. The Guard turned the property over to the 8th and 9th Aero Squadrons of the active-duty Army Air Service a few days later. During WWI, the base was primarily used to train pilots and aerial gunners for service in France.

The base was used extensively in World War II as a training site, including housing, for a time, of unit of the “Tuskegee Airmen,” an all-African American unit operating in the segregated military of the day.

The base was turned over to the Michigan Air National Guard in 1971 and most of the

active-duty military departed. Since that time, Selfridge Air National Guard Base has primarily been used for training of Guard and Reserve forces.

The base was named in honor of Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge who was the first member of the U.S. military to pilot an aircraft. He was also the first person in the world to die in an airplane crash, on a Sept. 17, 1908, flight with Orville Wright.

World War II – 107th FS

The 107th was first called to active duty prior to American entry into World War II. The squadron, equipped at the time with Douglas O-38 and North American O-47 observation planes and at its home station of Detroit Metropolitan Airport, was federalized on Oct. 15, 1940. The 107th was sent to the airfield at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana for unit training on Oct. 28, 1940. For many years this airfield was simply called the Artillery Range Airport Camp. Shortly after the arrival of the 107th, the airfield was renamed Esler Field, in honor of 107th pilot Lt. Wilmer Esler who was killed in the crash of an O-47 in a training flight at the field.

On Sept. 1, 1941, the 107th was joined by two other National Guard observation units to form the 67th Observation Group. One week after the Pearl Harbor attack of Dec. 7, 1941, the 67th Group was sent to Charleston Army Airfield in South Carolina, where it performed anti-submarine patrolling off the East Coast of the US until March 1942, when it returned to Louisiana for training in fighter aircraft.

The 67th Group was sent to Membury, England, in August 1942 and flew Mk V Spitfires and Tiger Moths for a year until equipped with F-6s, the observation variant of the P-51 Mustang. While in England, the 107th was re-located several times, operating at various points from RAF Membury, RAF Aldermaston and RAF Middle Wallop. Upon arrival at Middle Wallop on Dec. 11, 1943, the 107th began focusing on observation missions flown over the French coastline, in preparation for the D-Day invasion in June 1944. For successful photo missions of the French invasion coastline without loss of a single aircraft, the 107th was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation on 7 April 1945.

The 67th Group advance detachments landed in Normandy 13 days after D-Day. Assigned to support the First U.S. Army during the Normandy Campaign, the 107th was the first reconnaissance unit to operate from French soil. As the U.S. Army advanced from the French coast into Germany, the 107th continued to move to bases close to the front. In France, the squadron operated at Deux Jumeaux, Le Molay and Toussus-le-Noble airfields. In September 1944, the squadron moved forward to Belgium, operating at Gosselies and then Chievres airfields. On March 23, 1945, the 107th began operating in Germany, first at Vogelsang Airfield, then at Limburg and Eschwege airfields. At each location, 107th pilots and aircraft provided airborne reconnaissance for U.S. Army ground forces. The squadron's aerial reconnaissance was in particularly high demand during the Dec. 16, 1944-Jan. 25, 1945, Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive of the war. For its contributions in that battle, the 107th was awarded the Belgian Fourragere device.

The 107th remained on station in Germany through July 1945, several months after the German surrender. The squadron returned to the U.S. by troop transport ship and then spent about three months at an air base in Florida, before essentially going dormant and existing only as a paper unit until the 107th was re-organized in the Michigan National Guard (later Air National Guard) in 1946.

Almost exactly 60 years after it became the first observation squadron to operate in continental Europe during World War II, the 107th Fighter squadron became the first F-16 unit to be based in Iraq during operations there in 2004.

Today, the 107th Fighter Squadron operates A-10 Thunderbolt IIs at Selfridge Air National Guard Base.

A noted World War II Airman later became a member of the 107th squadron and helped organize the post-war Michigan Air National Guard.

Urban L. "Ben" Drew was a Detroit native who became the first pilot to shoot down two enemy jet aircraft in a single mission - while flying a propeller-driven P-51 Mustang -- in the later stages of World War II. Drew, who left the military as a major in 1950, also served as the first assistant adjutant general for air for the Michigan National Guard, helping to guide the organization of the Michigan Air National Guard in the years after the Air Force became a separate military service.

A native of Detroit and later an alumnus of both Wayne (now Wayne State) University and the University of Michigan, Drew was flying with the Yellowjackets of the 375th Fighter Squadron, 361st Fighter Group, in Europe when he became an ace, recording a total of six aerial victories. While flying in Europe, Drew's P-51 was nicknamed "The Detroit Miss" after his hometown.

Part of the Eighth Air Force flying out of England, Drew and his fellow Airmen were assigned to fly escort missions to U.S. bombers on missions into Germany. On Oct. 7, 1944, on a flight near Hamm, Germany, Drew engaged and shot down two German ME-262 jet aircraft - the first U.S. pilot or allied Airman to do so. That action drew a request from his squadron that he be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, but the medal was rejected due to a lack of supporting evidence. During the combat, the gun camera aboard the Detroit Miss jammed leaving no film of the victories. His Wingman during the flight, 2nd Lt. Robert McCandliss, was shot down by anti-aircraft fire during the flight and spent the remainder of the war as a prisoner of war.

Several decades later, the actions of Drew were reviewed by the Air Force - and confirmed by war records of the German Luftwaffe - and he was awarded the Air Force Cross for the action, one of only two such medals awarded for actions during World War II. Drew was finally awarded the medal in 1983. (The Air Force was not established as a separate service until two years after the war.)

After World War II, Drew left the active Air Force and became a member of the newly-re-designated 107th Bombardment Squadron (Light) of the newly-created Michigan Air National Guard. Through several name changes, the 107th today operates as the 107th Fighter Squadron, flying the A-10 Thunderbolt II. The 107th is nicknamed the "Red Devils." When Drew was

assigned to the unit as an instructor pilot, the squadron had recently begun flying F-51 Mustangs - essentially the same aircraft as the P-51, but re-designated in a new naming convention. Drew served with the Michigan Air National Guard 1947-1950.

Key Dates – 107th Squadron in World War II

December 20, 1943

The 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, formerly the 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan Air National Guard, commenced combat operations over France from the United Kingdom with its F-6A's in preparation for the Allied invasion of Europe.

February 23, 1944

The 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, formerly the 107th Observation Squadron, Michigan National Guard, and other units of the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group were assigned the responsibility of photographing the French coastline in preparation for the Normandy invasion, Operation Overlord.

World War II – 171st FS

The 171st Air Refueling Squadron was created during World War II and did not become assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard until several months after the end of the war.

The squadron was constituted on paper as the 374th Fighter Squadron on 28 January 1943 and activated on 10 February 1943, more than a year after the U.S. entry into World War II. The squadron operated throughout the war as the 374th and was a component of the 361st Fighter Group, 8th Air Force.

After initial training at bases in Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey, the squadron was forward deployed to RAF Bottisham, England on 30 November 1943. The 374th, flying P-47 Thunderbolt fighter aircraft, was tasked with providing fighter escort to the B-17 Superfortress and B-24 Liberator bombers assigned to the 8th Air Force, which were operating from England and assigned to bomb locations in Germany. While the unit served primarily as a bomber escort, the 374th, then a part of the U.S. Army Air Forces, did engage in other missions, at times assigned to strafe and dive-bomb strategic sites in Germany and in the German-controlled Netherlands.

Among the major battles that the 374th participated in were the bomb attacks against the German aircraft industry during “Big Week,” 20-25 February 1944. Prior to the 6 June D-Day landings, the 374th was assigned to numerous attacks on enemy transportation facilities, meant to stymie the Axis Powers’ ability to respond to the invasion.

While principally assigned to RAF Bottisham and RAF Little Walden in England, the unit operated from air fields in France and Belgium from 23 December 1944-7 April 1945.

The 374th flew its final combat mission on 20 April 1945 and was demobilized while still on station in England. The unit was officially de-activated on 24 October 1945. The unit remained dormant for about six months and then was re-activated, designated as the 171st Fighter

Squadron (Single Engine) and allotted to the Michigan Air National Guard on 24 May 1946, initially assigned to what is now known as Detroit Metropolitan Airport, where the unit was stationed until 1971 when it moved to Selfridge Air National Guard Base, where it remains today.

The 374th began the war flying the P-47 Thunderbolt. In May 1944, the unit transitioned to flying the P-51 Mustang. After being assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard, the new 171st squadron continued to fly the P-51 until 1950, when it then transitioned to its first jet-powered aircraft, the F-84 Thunderjet. It flew F-51 Mustangs again from 1952-1953.

Key Dates – 171st Squadron in World War II

January 28, 1942

The 374th Fighter Squadron is constituted at Richmond Army Air Base, Virginia. The unit is assigned the P-47 Thunderbolt.

November 30, 1943

The squadron is deployed to RAF Bottisham, England.

January 21, 1944

The squadron's first combat patrol on an area patrol west of St. Omer, France.

January 29, 1944

On the squadron's 4th mission, the squadron suffers its first combat loss: Lt. Charles B. Screws of the 374th was hit by flak and crash-landed his plane north of Amiens. He survived. The next day, the squadron claimed its first victories during the first of two bomber escort missions when 374th Squadron pilots destroyed four Me109s near Rheine, Germany, but Lt. Ethelbert F. Amason was killed in action, the first of 20 374th pilots and one enlisted man to make the ultimate sacrifice during the war.

May 1, 1944

The squadron receives its first P-51 Mustangs.

September 28, 1944

The squadron is assigned to RAF Little Walden, England.

December 23, 1944

The squadron is assigned to St. Dizier Airfield, France.

February 1, 1945

The squadron is assigned to Chievres Airdrome, Belgium.

April 7, 1945

The squadron returns to RAF Little Walden.

October 24, 1945

The squadron is inactivated.

May 24, 1946

The squadron is redesignated as the 171st Fighter Squadron (Single Engine) and assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard at Detroit-Wayne Major Airport (now Detroit Metropolitan Airport).

WWII – 172nd FS

The 172nd Squadron's story is similar to that of the 171st. Now the 172nd Air Support Squadron and assigned to a unmanned aerial vehicle mission, the 172nd is assigned to the 110th Air Wing, Battle Creek. The squadron was first created during World War II.

Constituted at Richmond (Virg.) Army Air Base as the 375th Fighter Squadron on Jan. 28, 1943 and officially activated on Feb. 10, the 375th was created to support U.S. and allied bomber aircraft in Europe. After training at several bases on the eastern seaboard, the 375th and its assigned P-47 Thunderbolts were assigned to the 361st Fighter Group, 8th Air Force in at RAF Bottisham, England, on Nov. 30, 1943.

The squadron served primarily as a bomber escort organization, covering the penetration, attack, and withdrawal of B-17/B-24 bomber formations that the USAAF sent against targets in Europe. The squadron also engaged in counter-air patrols, fighter sweeps, and strafing and dive-bombing missions. Separately, the squadron also attacked such targets as airdromes, marshalling yards, missile sites, industrial areas, ordnance depots, oil refineries, trains, and highways. During its operations, the unit participated in the assault against the German Luftwaffe and aircraft industry during the Big Week air campaign of Feb. 20–25, 1944, and the attack on transportation facilities prior to the Normandy invasion and support of the invasion forces thereafter, including the Saint-Lô breakthrough in July, 1944. In the summer of 1944, the squadron transitioned to using P-51 Mustangs (and then continued to fly P-51s through 1954.)

The squadron supported the airborne attack on the Netherlands in September 1944, and deployed to Chievres Airdrome, Belgium, between February and April, 1945, flying tactical ground support missions during the airborne assault across the Rhine. The unit returned to Little Walden and flew its last combat mission on April 20, 1945. Demobilized during the summer of 1945 in England, it inactivated in the United States as a paper unit in October 1945.

The squadron remained dormant until reconstituted and allotted to the Michigan Air National Guard May 24, 1946.

Korean War

The Korean War prompted the first major mobilization of the Michigan Air National Guard, less than five years after the Michigan ANG had been reorganized independent from the Michigan Army National Guard. The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when North Korea invaded South Korea. The war ended with an armistice signed on July 27, 1953.

Like all state Air National Guard units, Michigan's ANG was officially established on Sept. 18, 1947, when the U.S. Air Force was created as an independent component of the U.S. Armed Forces. Three and a half years later, essentially the entire Michigan ANG was mobilized due to the conflict in Korea. The Michigan units from the Detroit area – the 107th Fighter Squadron (Jet) and the 171st Fighter Squadron, both of which had been operating at Detroit Metro Airport – were deployed to Luke Air Force Base, and there re-designated as the 127th Pilot Training Wing. The Battle Creek-based 172nd Fighter Squadron was then sent to Detroit, on active duty, and

assigned to Air Defense Command at Selfridge Air Force Base (today Air National Guard Base). The Michigan ANG's 127th Aircraft Control & Warning Squadron was mobilized and sent to Fort Williams, Maine.

During the Korean War era, all three Michigan flying squadrons were components of the Michigan Air National Guard's 127th Fighter Group, which was command by Lt. Col. Donald W. Armstrong, January 1950-February 1951; Col. Henry J. Amen, February 1951-September 1952; and Col. Magnus B. Marks, September 1952-October 1958.

The 107th Fighter Squadron in the Korean era

In the spring of 1950, the 107th Bomb Squadron Light converted from B-26 Marauders to F-84 Thunderjets and on 1 July, 1950, was re-designated as the 107th Fighter Squadron (Jet). The F-84 was the first jet-powered aircraft assigned to the Michigan Air National Guard. On Feb. 1, 1951, the 107th was mobilized for the war and deployed to Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. On Feb. 10, 1951, the 107th and the 171st stood up the newly-created 127th Pilot Training Wing, Air Training Command, at Luke. 107th Airmen officially began training new pilots on March 1, 1951, initially training new Airmen to fly the F-51 Mustang (an aircraft 107th Airmen had flown prior to being assigned the B-26 at home station). Training with the F-51 lasted only a few weeks before the training moved to the F-84. The 107th remained on duty at Luke through Sept. 11, 1952, when it was released from active duty and returned to the Michigan Air National Guard. After the 107th returned to Michigan, it transitioned into the F-86 Sabre, and continued to operate at Detroit Metro Airport, which was then known as Detroit-Wayne Major Airport.

The 171st Fighter Squadron in the Korean era

In the spring of 1950, the 171st was converted from F-51 Mustangs to F-84 Thunderjets. On Feb. 1, 1951, the 171st was mobilized for the war and deployed to Luke Air Force Base, Ariz. On Feb. 10, 1951, the 107th and the 171st stood up the newly-created 127th Pilot Training Wing, Air Training Command, at Luke. 171st Airmen officially began training new pilots on March 1, 1951, initially training new Airmen to fly the F-51 Mustang. Training with the F-51 lasted only a few weeks before the training moved to the F-84. The 171st remained on duty at Luke until Nov. 1, 1952, when it was released from active duty and returned to Michigan. After the 171st returned to Michigan, it was re-designated as the 171st Fighter-Bomber Squadron and transitioned back to the F-51 Mustang for about a year before transitioning again into the F-86 Sabre. Back in Michigan, the squadron continued to operate at Detroit Metro Airport for the next two decades.

The Michigan ANG at Luke AFB

Luke Army Air Field was the largest fighter training base in the Army Air Forces during World War II. The base was deactivated Nov. 30, 1946, about a year after the war ended. After several years of relative dormancy, the base was re-activated as Luke Air Force Base on Feb. 1, 1951, for use as a training site. The Michigan ANG units arrived at Luke on Feb. 23, opening shuttered World War II buildings for use as the new USAF Air Crew School (Fighter-

Bomber/Escort). On Nov. 1, 1952, the active-duty 3600th Flying Training Wing (Fighter) was stood up and assumed the primary flight training duties at the base, allowing the two Michigan squadrons to be released from active service.

The 172nd Fighter Squadron in the Korean era

The Battle Creek-based 172nd was mobilized on Feb. 1, 1951, re-designated as the 172nd Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, and assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing, part of the Air Defense Command, at Selfridge Air Force Base. The squadron was one of 16 ANG flying squadrons activated on the same day and assigned to ADC at locations around the nation. The 172nd was flying F-51 Mustangs prior to the mobilization and continued to be assigned that aircraft through the end of the war. The 172nd remained on active duty at Selfridge through Nov. 1, 1952 when the squadron's mission – and aircraft – were assigned to the active duty 431st Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, which was stood up the same day. Following the demobilization, the 172nd returned to state control and home station at Kellogg Air National Guard Base in Battle Creek. It continued to fly the F-51 Mustang after demobilization until transitioning to the F-86 Sabre in 1954.

The 127th Aircraft Control & Warning Squadron in the Korean era

The 127th AC&WS was one of eight similar command & control ANG units from across the nation mobilized on Sept. 1, 1951. The Michigan squadron was assigned from its home base at Detroit Metro Airport to Fort Williams, a shore defense fort in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. The fort provided the harbor defense for the active shipping facilities in Portland, Maine. The squadron was assigned to the 4711th Air Defense Wing, providing command and control, operating the TPS-1B long-range radar system, for several fighter-interceptor squadrons assigned to the region. The 127th AC&WS remained on active duty for exactly two years, demobilizing and returning to home station at Detroit Metro Airport on Sept. 1, 1953. The active-duty 4711th was in operation for less than five years in total and was re-assigned in early 1956 to Selfridge Air Force Base. The 4711th was de-activated on July 8, 1956. The 127th AC&WS was de-activated in the 1960s.

Post-Korea

Following the Korean War, all three Michigan flying squadrons – the 107th and the 171st, both assigned to Detroit Metropolitan Airport, and the 172nd, assigned to Kellogg Air National Guard Base in Battle Creek – underwent major transformations. All three of the units had undergone full-scale mobilizations in the Korean War with the two Detroit-area units assigned to Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., to support pilot training and the 172nd sent to Selfridge AFB to support homeland defense.

After the war, all three of the units began major aircraft and mission transitions.

172nd Squadron

The 172nd Squadron, which was flying the P-15/F-51 as the 172nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron during the Korean War years, was assigned the F-86 Sabre in 1954 and the moved to the F-89 Scorpion in 1955. In 1956, the 172nd was assigned to the newly-created 110th Fighter Group, an arrangement which continues to this day, through various name changes at the squadron, group and wing level.

In 1958, the 172nd was assigned a new mission and designated as the 172nd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. With the mission change, the unit began flying the RB-57 Canberra, an aircraft it would fly until 1971. It was while flying the Canberra that the 172nd became an interesting footnote in Air Force history.

In late 1961, in a time of heightened Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the Soviets unexpectedly conducting a series of nuclear bomb tests. This prompted the U.S. to quickly plan a series of similar tests that were conducted in the spring and summer of 1962 in the Pacific Ocean. In April 1962, volunteers from a number of Air National Guard units were sought to support these tests. The 172nd was one of five ANG units to offer volunteer pilots and ground personnel to the highly-classified tests. In April, the 172nd personnel reported to Kirtland AFB, New Mexico for training. That summer, during a series of tests centered on Christmas Island in the Pacific, 172nd personnel flew specially-equipped RB-57s through the clouds of nuclear dust after the explosions to collect samples for scientific study in what was known as Operation Dominic and/or Operation Blue Straw.

107th Squadron

After returning to Michigan from Luke AFB during the Korean War, the 107th transitioned to flying the F-89 Scorpion in 1953 and was designated as the 107th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron. In 1958, the squadron's assignment changed again, this time to the RF-84 Thunderstreak when the unit became the 107th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron.

171st Squadron

The 171st returned to Michigan in late 1952 and was known for about a year as the 171st Fighter Bomber Squadron, with the squadron flying F-51 Mustangs. In November 1953, it was assigned the F-86 Sabre and in 1955 the F-89 Scorpion, flying both while designated as the 171st Fighter Interceptor Squadron. Then in 1958, it became the 171st Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, when it, too, began flying the RF-84.

1960s and early 1970s

All three Michigan flying squadrons were thus operating as reconnaissance squadrons through the 1960s and into 1971. For a variety of political and strategic reasons beyond the scope of this review, the Michigan Air National Guard – and, for the most part, the U.S. Army and Air National Guard as a whole – sat out the Vietnam War. That war did, however, mold a new generation of combat-experienced veterans, many of whom would later serve in leadership roles in the Guard over the next two decades.

There was one major mobilization of the Michigan ANG in the late 1960s. On July 24, 1967, over 80 percent of the Michigan Air Guard's 1,200 personnel were ordered to federal active duty because of riots in Detroit. They guarded utility installations, rode with police and firefighters, guarded prisoners, and secured a base at Detroit Metropolitan Airport. The reconnaissance aircraft of the various squadrons flew several dozen sorties over damaged parts of the city producing over 9,000 photos, and other unit members took over 400 ground photos. By July 30, all unit personnel but the Air Police had been demobilized. The latter remained on duty in Detroit until released from service on over the first few days of August.

All three Michigan flying squadrons would see their primary missions evolve in the 1970s and 1980s as the Guard was primarily viewed in that era as a strategic reserve.

In 1971, the 107th would begin flying the RF-101 Voodoo, still in a reconnaissance role. In 1972, it would move to the F-100 Super Sabre and be re-designated as a tactical fighter squadron. In 1979, the A-7 Corsair, a ground-attack fighter, was assigned to the 107th.

The 171st also began flying the RF-101 Voodoo in 1971, keeping that aircraft for only about a year before entering a major new chapter for the squadron. In 1973, while flying the F-106 Delta Dart, the 171st Fighter Interceptor Squadron stood up a new mission: standing alert for air defense of the Great Lakes region. The 171st maintained this mission through a transition to the F-4 Phantom in 1978. The 171st contained this air sovereignty mission through 1991, when most alert facilities along the northern U.S. border were closed as part of the "peace dividend" savings following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Over the 18 years that the 171st stood the alert mission, squadron pilots recorded 72 interceptions of Soviet bombers – an average of one every three months. The transition to the F-106 in 1971 also led to a new nickname being applied to the squadron — the Michigan Six-Pack. The nickname — along with a yellow and black checkerboard tail flash first used on the Michigan ANG F-106s — have been used in conjunction with the 171st ever since.

The 107th and 171st would also find a new home in 1971. In that year, Selfridge Air Force Base would be transferred from the control of the active duty U.S. Air Force to the Michigan ANG. Both the 107th and 171st moved from Detroit Metro Airport to Selfridge ANGB as a result of the change.

Meanwhile in Battle Creek, the 172nd would also enter a new era in 1971. Over the course of the next nearly 40 years, the 172nd would function in a series of air-to-ground attack roles. In 1971, the 172nd was designated as the 172nd Tactical Air Support Squadron and assigned the O-2 Skymaster. After 10 years with the OA-2, the 172nd upgraded to the OA-37 Dragonfly and fly that for 10 years. In the Skymaster and the Dragonfly, the 172nd was assigned a forward air control mission. Late, when the squadron was assigned A-10 Thunderbolt II fighters, the mission would transition to primarily close air support.

Desert Shield/Desert Storm/Gulf War I

In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, setting into motion a chain of events that eventually came to

be known variously as Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, Gulf War I, the Persian Gulf War and other names. Regardless of the name, the decision to place the U.S. military on a war footing resulted in the largest call-up of Air National Guard (and other Guard & Reserve personnel) since the end of the Korean War some 37 years earlier.

As fortune would have it, Gulf War I came at either an opportune or inopportune time for the flying units of the Michigan Air National Guard, depending upon one's point of view. All three squadrons had recently undergone or were in the process of transitions to new types of aircraft and were therefore not called to federal duty during the combat phase of the war.

The 107th, which had been flying the A-7 Corsair -- an air-to-ground attack aircraft -- since 1979, transitioned in a new role in 1989. Michigan's oldest flying squadron began flying the F-16 Fighting Falcon in that year (and in 1992 would be re-designated as the 107th Fighter Squadron).

With the standing down of its Cold War alert mission in 1991, the 171st also transitioned to a new aircraft in that year -- the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

The 172nd, meanwhile, transitioned to the A-10 Thunderbolt II in 1991. The arrival of the A-10 to Battle Creek changed the 172nd's primary focus from forward air control to close air support.

While the transition times meant that the Michigan flying squadrons were not available for the war, other elements of the Michigan Air National Guard were mobilized. From Battle Creek, firefighters and services personnel were sent to Air Force bases in the U.S. to back-fill forward deployed units. The 127th Security Police Flight from Selfridge was deployed to a military air base in Cairo, Egypt. From the 191st Tactical Fighter Group at Selfridge -- parent unit of the 171st squadron -- more firefighters and services personnel were sent to U.S. bases as back-fill. These unit deployments -- the largest of which were the 44 Security Police Airmen from the 127th SPF -- couple with numerous individual volunteers resulted in a total 232 Michigan Guard Airmen who were placed on federal status during the conflict. (Another 198 Air Force Reserve Airmen from Selfridge were also federalized and forward deployed during the war.)

While the mobilizations of Michigan Air National Guard Airmen during Gulf War I were relatively few, the conflict did reflect the dawning of a new era for the ANG.

Post-Gulf War I

Throughout the 1990s and prior to the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Michigan ANG units engaged in a number of overseas missions that either included or had the direct potential for aerial combat.

107th Squadron

The 107th deployed its F-16s and Airmen to Kuwait in 1997 to support Operation Southern Watch, one of two missions designed to keep the lid on the activities of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. The squadron would participate in Northern Watch, from Incirlik, Turkey, in

1999 and in the fall of 2001, a portion of the squadron was operating from Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, again engaged in Southern Watch, when the news broke about the attacks on New York, Washington D.C. and over rural Pennsylvania on Sept. 11.

171st Squadron

In 1995, the 171st made a major change in missions, changing aircraft from F-16s to C-130 Hercules and becoming the 171st Airlift Squadron in the process. Among the various assignments for the 171st in the 1990s were a number of relatively short-term deployments to Howard Air Force Base in Panama to support U.S. operations in Latin America. The 171st had also regularly taken on assignments to Howard while still in its F-16 days, part of a rotation with a number of ANG units and Air Force Reserve units from various states. In 1999, the 171st's Hercules would be the last ANG aircraft -- and among the last U.S. aircraft of any type -- to depart Howard as that base was turned over to Panamanian control, along with nearby U.S. Army Fort Clayton, as a result of a treaty which turned the Panama Canal over to Panamanian control. (The Michigan Army Guard's 1775th and 46th Military Police companies were the last Army NG units to operate at Fort Clayton as that installation also closed in 1999.) The first major operational assignment for the 171st after the switch to the C-130 came on Sept. 22, 1994, when the unit began operating from Incirlik AB in Turkey, flying missions as part of Operation Provide Comfort, which provided support and defense for the Kurdish people in northern Iraq in the post-Gulf War I period. The 171st/191st was one of six ANG units that provided aircraft and personnel to that mission on a rotating basis before the operation officially ended in December 1996.

172nd Squadron

Perhaps the most involved operation for a Michigan ANG unit in the 1990s was the 172nd's involvement in Operation Deny Flight, a United Nations-sanctioned No-Fly Zone that was implemented in April 1993 over Bosnia-Herzegovina in southern Europe. Beginning in December 1993, Airmen and A-10 aircraft from the Battle Creek unit joined with several other ANG and Air Force Reserve units to form a combined unit, based in Aviano, Italy, to enforce the zone. By the time all of the 172nd personnel returned home in January 1995, more than 400 Michigan ANG Airman had deployed to be a part of an expeditionary squadron that had flown 520 sorties, amount to more than 1,400 flight hours, working to prevent the further spread of war into Kosovo. The 172nd would later be awarded an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for its actions in Deny Flight. In a related effort, in 1996, air crew members and maintainers from the 191st Airlift Group from Selfridge, operating C-130 Hercules, deployed to Germany over a period of two months to fly support missions into Bosnia as part of Operation Joint Endeavor. Finally, in 1999, A-10s and Airmen from the 110th would return to region -- with only seven days elapsing from the time of the call-up at home station to the first combat sortie in Kosovo -- to support Operation Allied Force. Again, the 110th/172nd Airmen were part of a "rainbow" unit made up from several Guard squadrons around the U.S. During the 78-day war, however, the ANG units functioned as one strong team, as reported by a Pentagon spokesman at the time:

“The first night into the fight the Guard A-10s destroyed almost a dozen [Serbian] tanks and the same number of artillery pieces. It was a great show right off the bat.”

1996

While not part of the “combat” history of the Michigan ANG, a major change was implemented in 1996 that impacted the operation of the 107th and 171st squadrons. Under the Air Force’s new “one base / one wing” policy, the 127th Tactical Fighter Wing — parent of the 107th — and the 191st Airlift Group — parent of the 171st — were merged into a single wing, now called the 127th Wing. (The 127th lineage was the older of the two, dating back to World War I and therefore took precedence.) The 191st designation continues to exist for the aircraft maintenance squadrons affiliated with the 171st, all of which now currently (as of 2015) fall under the 127th Air Refueling Group, a component of the 127th Wing.

Sept. 11, 2001

As it did for many Americans, the world changed significantly for the Michigan Air National Guard on Sept. 11, 2001. The ANG was on a peace-time footing as the dawn broke. By lunchtime, combat-loaded aircraft were ready to roll – only this time at home station, not at a forward-deployed location.

Several of the 107th’s F-16s were in fact deployed on Sept. 11, assigned to Saudi Arabia to help enforce a no-fly zone over Iraq. Two other 107th F-16s were airborne in Michigan when the news came of the initial attacks in New York that morning – the F-16s were returning to Selfridge from a training mission at the air gunnery range in Grayling and were out of ammunition and had only enough fuel to return to base. The Red Devil F-16s returned to Selfridge and were quickly armed with live weapons and refueled. As hundreds of Guard Airmen reported to the base and quickly began standing up what would become a 24-hour alert mission again, the 107th launched F-16s to guard the American homeland. Over the next week, 107th F-16s were airborne continuously over the Detroit region before moving to a series of irregular patrols coupled with aircraft on alert status on the Selfridge runway.

The Michigan ANG Airmen initially began the 24-hour alert mission that day operating from a school bus parked on the flight line. Eventually, several tents were erected. Ironically, the old alert hangars, still standing from the days when the 171st stood alert at Selfridge, were scheduled to be demolished in less than a month. The demolition plans were cancelled and the hangars were refurbished. In 2006, the alert mission, still operated by the 107th, was temporarily re-located to the base in Battle Creek, to allow for runway repairs at Selfridge.

Finally, on Oct. 2, 2008 – seven years and about two weeks after the Air Sovereignty Alert was stood up by the 107th in an unexpected scramble on Sept. 11th – the alert mission came to an end at Selfridge and was re-assigned to the 180th Fighter Wing in Toledo, Ohio, as the 107th began yet another aircraft and mission transition, this time to the A-10 Thunderbolt II.

Post 9/11

With the launching of combat operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, Michigan units were tapped repeatedly to provide support to the new war effort.

107th Squadron:

Between its return from Saudi Arabia in December 2001 and 2013, the Red Devils of the 107th Fighter Squadron have participated in four major deployments – three while flying the F-16 Fighting Falcon and one after a transition to the A-10 Thunderbolt II.

The first deployment was in spring 2003, to Incirlik, Turkey, there to support Operation Northern Watch, the no-fly mission over Iraq. During the deployment, 107th aircraft fired live weapons in combat for the first time since World War II, while in operation over Iraq.

On Feb. 27, 2004, the 107th was again deployed, this time to Kirkuk air base in Iraq – a former Iraqi air force installation. The 107th became the first F-16 unit in the Air Force to operate from a base inside Iraq and also was the first to employ the Theater Airborne Reconnaissance System pod that had been developed by the ANG. During the deployment, Michigan F-16s provided direct air superiority and close air support during the First Battle of Fallujah in April 2004. The unit returned to Iraq a final time in 2007 with the F-16, again to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In 2008, the 107th began a transition from the F-16, which it had been operating since 1989, to the A-10 Thunderbolt II. As the unit was nearing the end of its transition period, the command was notified of a pending deployment to Afghanistan. In early 2011, the date for the deployment was moved up by six months, prompting the Michigan Airmen to accelerate final training timetables. The 107th deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan in late 2011 and early 2012, returning home on Jan. 9, 2012. Over the 120-day deployment period, the unit logged approximately 8,300 flight hours in 2,000 sorties, or flight missions.

171st Squadron:

Flying the C-130 Hercules as the 171st Airlift Squadron, the 171st made two significant deployments to Afghanistan.

The first came in early 2004 during a period of significant military infrastructure build-up in Iraq. The Selfridge-based C-130s operated from Bagram air base in Afghanistan and were engaged in tactical airlift throughout the region. The 171st returned to Afghanistan in late 2006 for a similar mission.

In 2007, the 171st and related units at Selfridge began the transition to the KC-135 Stratotanker and became the 171st Air Refueling Squadron. Beginning in 2009, at least one 171st air crew and aircraft have been on-call to support domestic or overseas missions as assigned by Air Mobility Command's Tanker Airlift Control Center (TACC), including service for aeromedical evacuation duty. Beginning in 2010, one or more of the 171st's tankers and/or

Airmen operated in almost continuous mobilization status. Beginning in 2010, the Michigan Six-Pack began supporting regular deployment rotations to the U.S. Pacific Command region, as well as several to the European command to support NATO operations there. In 2011, the 171st and supporting Airmen began a series of ongoing “rolling” mobilizations, in which one to two dozen Michigan ANG Airmen were deployed to the Central Command region, which includes both Iraq and Afghanistan. As one Michigan ANG crew returned home, another deployed in its place. In a separate operation in 2011, the 171st launched a KC-135 with a supporting air and maintenance crew about four hours after receiving an alert notice, to support Operation Odyssey Dawn, the U.S. and allied military response in and around Libya.

172nd Squadron:

Two incidents early in the war in Iraq highlighted the 172nd squadron’s 2003 deployment to support the initial U.S. invasion of that nation. Operating from a base in Kuwait, the 172nd’s A-10s were assigned to provide close air support to American ground forces as they made their successful initial push into Iraq.

On April 8, 2003 – two days before the fall of Baghdad – two A-10s flown by the 172nd were hit by surface-to-air missiles while flying near the Iraqi capital city. One of the Warthogs was shot down – though the pilot was quickly rescued – and another managed to return to an alternate base. The two aircraft were flying in separate flights at the time of their respective incidents.

One enemy SAM hit A-10, call sign Facing 43, as it supported the advance of the 3d Infantry Division through the southern suburbs of Baghdad. The pilot, Maj Jim Ewald of the 172nd flew for about 10 minutes until the aircraft began to yaw uncontrollably and then ejected. After parachuting to the ground, Ewald took shelter among some reeds along a canal. Concerned about Fedayeen Saddam paramilitary units active in the area, he heard his aircraft crash and mistook the exploding ordnance of his A-10 as enemy fire. Fortunately, American troops from the 54th Engineer Battalion of the 3d Infantry Division watched his descent and sent a forward team in a Bradley fighting vehicle to his location. Ewald heard what he thought were American voices but remained cautious. Hearing a shout of, “Hey pilot dude! Come out, we are Americans,” Ewald broke cover and sprinted to the Bradley, whose soldiers pulled him inside and sped away. An hour after arriving at a nearby field hospital, Ewald was on his way back to Kuwait in a helicopter from the 301st Rescue Squadron. Two days later, he resumed flying combat.

The same day, another Battle Creek A-10 flown by 172nd pilot Maj. Gary Wolf was hit by a surface-to-air missile while he was providing reconnaissance support to a coalition convoy commander. Wolf managed to keep control of the aircraft and, deploying countermeasures, turned to the south and friendly territory. Some 45 minutes later, he reached Tallil air base in southern Iraq, which was control by U.S. and allied forces. Upon landing, Wolf – and those on the ground – was stunned by the extensive damage done to his right engine. The engine and cowling was removed, a new one swapped in and the aircraft returned to service. Almost 10 years later, the original engine cowling was re-discovered and “de-constructed” by 110th Attack Wing personnel at Battle Creek – “un-restored” to its war-damaged appearance. The cowling is

now on display at the Air Zoo museum in Kalamazoo.

Other units

In addition to the various support units which deployed alongside Michigan's three flying squadrons and the hundreds, more likely thousands, of Michigan ANG Airmen who have deployed as individuals or in twos or threes over the 2001-2013 period, two other unit-level deployments are noted from that period.

The 127th Security Forces Squadron, augmented by Airmen from the 110th Security Forces Squadron, spent six months assigned to Camp Sather in Baghdad beginning in August 2010. There, the SFS Airmen provided security for that base and other locations.

In 2011, the 127th Civil Engineer Squadron spent six months in Afghanistan, during which time they accomplished some 160 construction projects, worth more than a combined total of \$75 million. Many of their projects in that deployment were conducted "outside the wire" – in other words, off an American or coalition controlled base – in which the Michigan Airmen were not only constructing a project, but were providing their own security during their operations.

#

As this history was prepared in 2015, a number of additional deployments by Michigan Airmen had recently completed or were still underway. Based on those activities, the next 50-60 years of history of the Michigan Air National Guard is off to a highly-honorable start.